DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 469 542 RC 023 633

AUTHOR	Wrigley, Pamela
TITLE	The Challenge of Educating English Language Learners in Rural Areas.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	9p.; In: NABE News, 2000-2001; see ED 455 684.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.escort.org/html/whatsnew.htm#anchor139219.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrator Role; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Isolation; Educational Change; Educational Environment; Educational Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; English (Second Language); Hispanic Americans; *Immigrants; Language Minorities; *Limited English Speaking; Multicultural Education; Principals; *Rural Schools; School Districts; Staff Development

ABSTRACT

Rural school districts are experiencing an influx of language minority students. Rural communities generally have little experience with people from other cultures and have fewer resources and bilingual people. At the district level, leaders who view the influx of immigrants in a positive light are more likely to prepare a well thought out plan for serving their English Language Learners (ELLs). An example shows the steps taken in a rural Virginia district to implement a well-researched program that set the district on the right path for years to come. Although the district provides structure and guidance, it is the school principal who ensures that programs are properly implemented and maintained. Schools that are successfully helping their ELLs have principals with positive attitudes towards their new population. Successful principals arrange training sessions for all staff on cultural awareness, schedule ongoing training sessions for mainstream teachers on English-as-second-language (ESL) strategies, actively recruit ethnically diverse teachers and staff, encourage collaboration between mainstream and ESL teachers, support extended-day opportunities for ELLs, purchase classroom and library resources that broaden student understanding of different cultures, and reach out to parents using their native language. The increased emphasis on standards and high-stakes testing and related questions about fair treatment of ELLs can support rural district efforts to obtain additional funding. The Department of Education provides free technical assistance, and there are often community resources and volunteers that can be tapped. (TD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 469 542

The Challenge of Educating English Language Learners in Rural Areas

An increasing number of school districts across the U.S. are experiencing an influx of language minority students as the strong economy continues to create a wide range of job opportunities. It is projected that in 20 years about 1 in 6 residents will be of Hispanic origin; and by the middle of this century the ratio will increase to about 1 in 4. The vast majority of immigrants settle in large urban areas, but their numbers are increasing dramatically in rural areas where 57 percent (up from 48 percent in the 1980's) are of Mexican origin (Huang, 1999). Poultry processing plants and meat packing firms are attracting immigrants to rural areas in record numbers.

As Gary Huang reports in his ERIC Digest entitled *Sociodemographic Changes: Promises and Problems for Rural Education* (January, 1999)

"Immigrants in rural areas have attained, on average, less education relative to urban immigrants. High school completion rates, for example, are lower among rural immigrants aged 25 and older than among their urban counterparts. And this gap seems to be widening: metro immigrants who have entered the country since 1980 report increasingly higher rates of school completion, whereas completion rates among recent nonmetro immigrants remains low."

Many educators who work with ELLs in rural areas lament the fact that their language minority students are dropping out at unusually high rates, but they are hard pressed to find solutions to this seemingly intractable problem.

Rural communities do not generally have much experience with "outsiders" of any sort. There are many rural areas where a majority of the local residents have had little to no experience with people from other cultures. This can lead to fear and misunderstanding when immigrants begin to settle in an isolated community. In addition, small school districts tend to have less access to resources and bilingual people—both of which are essential to meeting the needs of the newly arrived language minority students and their families.

In this article, I propose to highlight some promising practices in the area of serving ELLs in rural schools. The problems and challenges are well known, but I would like to emphasize that there are many districts--against all odds--that are making remarkable strides in improving the achievement and high school completion rates of their language minority students.

District-level efforts

The districts that have leaders who view the influx of immigrants in a positive light are more likely to prepare a well thought out plan for serving their ELLs. Too often, educators in small districts are in denial about the fact that immigrant families are settling in their area, and they put off devising a coherent plan for serving ELLs until the growing

RC 023633

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
•- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Pamela Wrigley
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

number of students is impossible to ignore. By this time, teachers and students have experienced a great deal of frustration due to the lack of instructional and moral support.

An example of a district that chose the proactive route is one that I encountered in rural Virginia. They had a few language minority students spread out among a lot of different schools—no school had more than about five or six students. One of the district curriculum specialists was assigned the duty of administering the nascent English as a Second Language program. As is often the case with people who are assigned this task in rural areas, she had no ESL experience. What she did have was a can-do attitude that inspired her to search out resources about the field of ESL and what constitutes a model ESL program. Here are some early steps she took:

- Called the state ESL person for information
- Studied the Office for Civil Rights guidelines and recommendations (www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/index)
- Made a case to the school board that the district was obligated to meet the needs of their ELLs according to federal mandates, and projected the number of qualified ESL teachers that would be needed
- Instituted a home language survey for the entire district
- Researched a test that could be used district-wide to assess the English proficiency level of the ELLs
- Read some key articles from the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE) website (www.ncbe.gwu.edu)
- Began a hiring process to seek out qualified ESL personnel
- Assigned the ESL teacher with the most experience as the district's "lead" teacher
- Gave the lead ESL teacher a stipend over the summer to write an ESL plan for the district
- Sponsored and encouraged training sessions for mainstream teachers in recommended instructional and assessment strategies that they could use to increase the comprehension and performance of their ELLs.

This district leader took these steps over ten years ago, and, as expected, their language minority population has continued to grow. Due to these thoughtful early steps, the district has become a model for surrounding rural districts that are struggling with similar challenges. This Virginia district is so dedicated to ensuring that ELLs are taught to high standards that they have hired an ESL teacher to teach "sheltered" high school courses for as few as three or four students. This level of commitment is unusual, but it

shows that a district which had the good fortune to have an open-minded, positive leader who did the groundwork necessary to implement a well-researched program, can set the district on the right path for years to come.

School-level efforts

Key role of the school principal

Positive leadership is necessary at every level in order for a school to successfully implement programs and practices that benefit their language minority students. The district can provide structure and guidance, but it is the school principal who ensures that the programs are properly implemented and maintained. It is the principal who sets the tone of acceptance, who encourages his or her staff to warmly welcome the language minority students and their families. I cannot stress enough the importance of the principal's attitude in areas such as valuing what students bring both culturally and linguistically, and initiating efforts to communicate with the families on a meaningful level. In my experience, the schools that are most effectively addressing the many needs of their ELLs are those schools that have a principal who views the new population as an enriching rather than problematic addition to the school environment.

In addition to the importance of modeling a positive attitude for teachers, a principal needs to make it a priority to schedule meaningful and ongoing training for the entire faculty. The training sessions ensure that the teachers become more culturally aware and learn about the kinds of instructional and assessment modifications that they should use in order to make their lesson content comprehensible to their ELLs. The most successful principals I have encountered use many of the following strategies:

- Arrange a series of training sessions for all staff on cultural awareness--going beyond the elements of "surface" culture into the richer area of value systems and why people act and think the way they do

- Schedule a series of training sessions for mainstream teachers on the nature of second language acquisition and ESL strategies and resources. The training should be conducted both at the school level and the classroom level and it should be ongoing

- Include the degree to which suggested instructional modifications are used when rating a teacher's performance--if he or she has ELLs.

- Encourage, and allot time in the schedule for, collaboration between mainstream and ESL teachers

- Support extended day opportunities for ELLs so that they can receive help with their schoolwork and/or participate in extracurricular activities

- Dedicate library resources to buying books that represent a wide variety of viewpoints and cultures

- Reach out to parents using their native language to gain their trust and keep them informed. Invite them to parent meetings and provide them with a clear idea of what U.S. schools expect of them and how they can help

Ways to reduce cultural isolation

I have often heard language minority students tell me that they do not "see themselves" (people who look like them) in schools where there are only a few students from ethnically diverse backgrounds. This sense of not belonging is often cited as a primary factor in a student's reason for dropping out of school. Comments such as "no one cares about me" are commonplace, and can lead to a profound sense of isolation. This feeling of isolation is particularly acute in older students who are increasingly sensitive to differences and how they fit in or do not fit in with their peers. The teenage years are difficult enough without this additional challenge to forging a healthy sense of self.

What can schools do to help? On every level, attention needs to be paid to whether cultural diversity is valued and whether students representing minority cultures are respected. This means that every member of the school staff and all students should be provided with opportunities to understand how culture not only shapes, but also limits, their actions (Spears, 1990). As Jenny Oliver states in her ERIC Digest entitled *Charting New Maps: Multicultural Education in Rural Schools (*August, 1992).

"In this sense, multicultural education seeks to create an environment in which students can understand, respect, and ultimately value cultural diversity."

"Easier said than done", say many educators who are frustrated with working in a school where the climate is hostile to language minority students. As mentioned previously, providing training sessions for teachers can be a beneficial first step. Over the years I have observed a number of other successful strategies:

Actively recruit ethnically diverse teachers and support staff.

This is particularly difficult in rural areas, but advertising job openings in a wide variety of settings and publications often pays off. These valuable faculty members and home-school liaisons can help a school to bridge the cultural and linguistic divides that impede understanding and communication. It is also advantageous to have students "see themselves" in people who are in positions of authority.

Purchase resources for both the classrooms and the library that broaden the students' understanding of different cultures.

These materials need to be selected with care in order to avoid the pitfall of inadvertently promoting negative cultural stereotypes (for example, choosing books that uniformly depict Latinos as gang members). This is a difficult task when the media is constantly

promoting negative stereotypes. There are many helpful resources available on the web--a couple of interesting articles that are available through the NCBE (www.ncbe.gwu.edu) or Department of Education (www.ed.gov) ERIC Clearinghouse data base are: *Integrating Mexican-American History and Culture into the Social Studies Classroom,* Kathy Escamilla, September, 1992 and *Promoting Reading Among Mexican-American Children*, Yvonne Murray & José Velázquez, December, 1999).

Cultivate links between home and school.

The most successful schools go beyond simply translating important documents. One school that I worked with in rural Virginia had a principal who believed strongly in the benefits of actively involving all of his parents. When he saw that his Hispanic parents were not coming to his regular meetings (even when he informed them that translators would be available), he initiated a series of Hispanic parent nights that were designed to inform the Spanish-speaking parents about what schools expect of them in the U.S. and how they can support and promote their children's education. These meetings were conducted in Spanish (although translation was provided for English-speaking participants) and, to the principal's delight, nearly every parent showed up. The parents were so excited about feeling welcome at their children's school that they asked the principal whether they could meet once a month. The principal agreed to two meetings a year and, over time, these same parents who reluctantly attended the first meeting began to gain confidence and participate in field trips and committees.

Striving to reduce the cultural isolation experienced by both the local population and the newcomers is worth doing. There is a lot of research that supports the use of strategies aimed at broadening everyone's world view. Any effort that results in individuals becoming more accepting--and less judgmental--of those who are different is sure to lead to an improved school climate.

"Spears and colleagues (1990) reported that, to some participants, multicultural education made school more 'relevant', contributing, they believed, to decreased rates of dropping out. Others reported a decrease in racial stereotyping, leading to better relationships among students. Among ethnic minority students, a cultural 'grounding,' or sense of belonging was reported, and demonstrated through behaviors indicating increased self-confidence."
(Jenny Oliver & Craig Howley, *Charting New Maps: Multicultural Education in Rural Schools*, ERIC Digest, August, 1992)

Capitalizing on the emphasis placed on standards, accountability and Hispanics

The increased emphasis on standards and accountability is the name of the game in every state. There has been a lot of attention paid to the question of whether high-stakes standardized tests are inherently unfair to minority and language minority students. This is a valid issue which is being studied on many levels and bears watching. However, one of the positive aspects of the standards movement has been an increase in

resources that are dedicated to education and a focus on how to improve the achievement of low-performing populations.

A small school district in North Carolina was struggling to meet the needs of their burgeoning population of ELLs. Once the state accountability standards began to have an impact, the district joined a chorus of voices that lobbied at the state level to ask for extra money to bolster programs targeting ELLs. The state legislators agreed to contribute funding to the effort to help language minority students meet the high standards they had imposed. As a consequence, this small district was able to hire one more ESL teacher with the extra money. This meant that the ELLs would receive more hours of individualized and small group instruction each day.

This lobbying effort can be replicated at the local level as well. Those who are advocating for better programs for ELLs can make a strong case by showing the district the number of students who are either unable to take the state test or receive a low score. Every district and every school wants scores to improve, so they are increasingly receptive to suggestions of how to improve the performance of their ELLs. An article entitled "SOL Program Gives Rural Schools a Boost" appeared in the Washington Post recently and describes how the Virginia Standards of Learning accountability system has led to increased state and local funding for rural districts.

At the federal level, in particular, there has been an emphasis on creating and expanding programs that have shown promise in narrowing the performance gap and reducing the persistently high dropout rate of Hispanic students. It is important to remember that the Title I program, which is operating in nearly every school in the country, is mandated to serve ELLs who are in need of extra assistance to perform at grade level. The barriers that prevented the Title I program from serving language minority students were eliminated in 1994. The Department of Education provides free technical assistance through a variety of federally-funded centers. In addition, there is a wealth of information about free resources and grant opportunities on the DOE website.

Searching out community resources

Every school district that I have visited has community resources that are often waiting to be tapped. Help may come from local libraries, or volunteer organizations, or churches, or simply individuals interested in helping immigrant families and their children in any way they can. In a rural district in Maryland that I visited, the schools were reeling from a sudden influx of non-English speaking students. The principal called the local chapter of Literacy Volunteers of America and asked if they could lend a hand. The LVA members were excited about the challenge and worked with the schools where there were concentrations of language minority students to develop after-school tutoring programs. The schools agreed to provide the transportation and the LVA volunteers furnished most of the tutors. This was a win-win situation that grew out of a phone call to a local volunteer organization.

Many years ago, while I was working with a migrant education program in Virginia, a family brought their older children from Mexico. One of the girls was about to enter high school and, although she had been an excellent student in Mexico, she was not sure that she could succeed. Maricela did not know a word of English as she began her first day of classes, and this particular high school had never had an ELL apart from an occasional foreign exchange student. They were totally unprepared and even though the Spanish teacher agreed to help whenever she could, it was clear that Maricela was going to be on her own.

I put the word out to local community members and agencies, and a retired teacher responded that she would like to help. This teacher quickly bonded with Maricela and agreed to see her for at least an hour each day. This special individual gave Maricela the start she needed while the school scrambled to go through the process of making their case to the school board to hire more personnel. It turned out that Maricela and her volunteer teacher became great friends and Maricela's family frequently invited the teacher over to partake of mom's special "mole" long after their daughter was holding her own in English. Maricela graduated from high school within four years and at her graduation party gave much of the credit to the woman who had given her so much support and encouragement when she needed it most.

Expecting success

The one element that all of these examples of best practices have in common is that they do not allow for any option but success. The district leader expected to be successful when she set about devising a coherent plan for serving their district ELLs. The school principals expected to engender successful outcomes by communicating to their staff members, students and parents that taking time to learn about each other and working together they could become a true community of learners. State and federal government agencies expect students to be successful by holding schools more accountable for teaching and learning. And the volunteer tutor believed in Maricela and expected that she would graduate in four years.

Educators in rural areas have tremendous challenges as they strive to meet the needs of their language minority students. With optimistic leadership, well-trained teachers, and informed parents who all share an expectation of success, the students are likely to realize their potential. Every community, no matter how isolated, has creative people and helpful resources that can improve the quality of education for English language learners. A small success can be a start--and each success breeds other successes. Failure must not be an option for any student.

References

Huang, G. (1999). *Sociodemographic Changes: Promises and Problems for Rural Education.* ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Oliver, J. & Howley, C. (1992). *Charting New Maps: Multicultural Education in Rural Schools*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Schlusberg, P. & Mueller, T. (1995). *English as a Second Language in Volunteer-Based Programs*. ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.

Pamela Wrigley has worked as a teacher and bilingual resource specialist with a variety of ESL and Migrant Education programs for 14 years. She is presently a senior education specialist and provides technical assistance to schools and districts through the Eastern Stream Center on Resources and Training (ESCORT). Please direct any comments or feedback to pgwrig@worldnet.att.net

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC REPRODUCTION RELEASE

I. Document Identification:

Title: THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN RURAL AREAS

Author: PAMELA C. WRIGLEY

Corporate Source:

Publication Date: NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2000 IN THE NABE NEWS

II. Reproduction Release:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please check one of the following three options and sign the release form.

✓ Level 1 - Permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g. electronic) and paper copy.

___ Level 2A - Permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only.

___ Level 2B - Permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only.

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but no option is marked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

Sign Here: "I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries."

Signature: Pamela Wrigley
Printed Name: PAMELA WRIGLEY
Address: 2800 WOODLEY RD., NW WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008

Position: SENIOR EDUCATION SPECIALIST
Organization: ESCORT
Telephone No: (202) 483-3957
Date: 8/21/02

RC023633

III. Document Availability Information (from Non-ERIC Source):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:

Address:

Price per copy: Quantity price:

IV. Referral of ERIC to Copyright/Reproduction Rights Holder:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please complete the following:

Name: ALICIA SOSA
NABE - DIRECTOR OF MEMBERSHIP & PUBLICATIONS

Address: 1030 15TH ST., NW SUITE 470
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
PHONE: (202) 898-1829 FAX: (202) 789-2866

V. Attach this form to the document being submitted and send both to:

Velma Mitchell, Acquisitions Coordinator
ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
P.O. Box 1348
1031 Quarrier Street
Charleston, WV 25325-1348

Phone and electronic mail numbers:

800-624-9120 (Clearinghouse toll-free number)
304-347-0467 (Clearinghouse FAX number)
mitchelv@ael.org